

PAUL KAREN

WITH THIS RING

21

ACT III

This scene can be played a few different ways but it is best to portray two emotionally wounded people

SETTING: The apartment is now sparse with just a small table and two chairs on which sits a manual typewriter. A small wastebasket filled with crumbled paper is beside the table. A telephone of the period sits on a small table. The window is bare with no coverings.

AT Rise: Paul Gentile, late 40s, sits at kitchen table. He is typing on a typewriter.

PAUL: Damn, this is not working.

He pulls paper from typewriter, crumples it and throws it into wastebasket beside table.

The lights in the apartment start to flicker.

Great. Here we go again. I cannot write plays in this environment.

He goes to telephone and dials.

Hey Betty, it's me, what are you up to? ...Watching T.V., what's on? ...

(repeating)

Crime story, channel seven! No, no I'm not watching, they repossessed my T.V. last week. Besides, I live in the worst neighborhood in Rockaway, if I want crime story I just look out the window and watch the muggings... What did you think of the play I sent you? Uh huh... A part for you? Why, did I promise you a part? ...You can't hold me to that, I promise every actress in town a part!. I'm thinking of having a table reading here next week. Hey, can you bring a table? I sold mine... Yes I'm kidding. No, I have not been gambling again. Are you nagging me? I thought you had to be my girlfriend to have that privilege.

(Lights start to flicker)

You better bring a flashlight too. Yeah, the lights again. I think it's faulty wiring. Nah I can't. I can't go out tomorrow night. I've got seven bucks to my name until payday and I'm down to one box of macaroni and cheese.

Knock at the door.

Someone's at the door... I gotta go... who is it?

KAREN *(with slight anger and sarcasm):* It's Karen, Paul.

PAUL: The soon to be ex-wife. And I thought it was going to be a quiet day. Talk to you later if they don't disconnect the phone.

He hangs up phone.

It's open.

KAREN: This is where you're living? What a terrible neighborhood. And you leave the door open like that? Aren't you afraid you'll get robbed?

PAUL: Look at this place. What would they take? Burglars come here and leave me stuff 'cause they feel sorry for me.

KAREN: Always with the sarcasm, huh Paul? You're two flights up. Do you even have air conditioning?

PAUL: It's cheap, the window's open and the neighborhood will make a comeback one day. God Isn't making any more land near the ocean in Rockaway. I take long walks on the beach. I sometimes get inspiration.

KAREN: What else would I expect from a dreamer like you?

(She notices wooden angel)

Who's that your, bookie.

PAUL *(he gives her a look)*: It's also peaceful. Usually.

KAREN *(as she looks at window)*: There isn't even a screen on this window. Flies can come right in.

PAUL: Good, maybe I can charge them rent.

KAREN: I brought the papers from my lawyer.

She places envelope on table.

PAUL: I suppose I should have a lawyer read them.

KAREN: Sounds like a smart idea to me.

PAUL: How are the kids?

KAREN: The *children* are fine. Not that you really care. They never hear from you.

PAUL: They're grown.

KAREN: They're teenagers, Paul. Don't you remember what it was like when you were a teenager? Well now I'm dealing with it... alone.

PAUL: Listen, are we going to get into drama again. Because I really don't want to.

KAREN: What happened to us Paul? What happened to you?

PAUL: People change.

KAREN: I'm not the one who wanted to get separated or divorced.

PAUL: But we both know it's better this way. Why should the kids see us fight? I grew up with that. It's no healthier for them growing up in a dysfunctional environment than in a stable one-parent home.

KAREN: Really? And who appointed you the expert on child rearing? What do you know about it? So what am I supposed to tell them Paul? What do I tell your children when they ask me why you left?

PAUL: Give it a rest Karen. Let's not rehash this. I don't want to get into blaming again.

KAREN: The trouble is you don't know what you want. You didn't want to be a husband or a father, that's for sure. Big playwright, big novelist, big delusional dreamer.

PAUL: You knew what I did when you met me. Remember, when you thought I was charming and creative.

KAREN: I thought you'd outgrow it. I thought when you started to have a family you'd prioritize. But not you.

PAUL: A hit novel makes a lot of money.

KAREN: You had a good steady day job at the bank, a Vice President.

PAUL: All title and no money. We've been through this a thousand times.

KAREN: It's not just that. You had no interest in the kids. You'd lock yourself up in your office after work and write until bedtime. You ignored the kids.

PAUL: I played with the kids.

KAREN: You ignored them. You wouldn't even play catch with your own son, why? Why, damn you?

PAUL (*rises from chair and paces*): How should I know? Because my father never played catch with me. Because I knew you wanted me to and I resented your controlling nature. Oh, you learn a lot when you've been in therapy twice a week for three years.

KAREN: Why the hell did you get married anyway?

PAUL: Why the hell does anyone get married? They're conditioned by society. They're co-dependent. Someone tells them how great they are and they buy into it.

KAREN: You threw away a promising career and a family for what? All I wanted was a husband. Why do you have to be the guy who writes plays and books?

PAUL: Because I can. Because somebody has to write them. If you hadn't noticed the plays are pretty good. People like them. Three of them are published.

KAREN: Great, the kids need the money for college.

PAUL: Well that about sums it up. It's all about the cash isn't it? Why didn't you marry Johnny the plumber if you wanted money? He's got piles of cash from that business and he chased you for years.

KAREN: Don't think that thought hasn't crossed my mind.

PAUL: Oh I'll tell you why. Because he couldn't make you laugh the way I could. He wouldn't take you out dancing or to the theatre. He didn't know Shakespeare from the three stooges. Well now I make plenty of people laugh when they see my plays. Sometimes I make them cry.

KAREN (*she mockingly claps her hands*): Bravo... Get over yourself. It's all about you, Paul, isn't it? It always was. You wanted to be the center of the universe.

KAREN: The trouble is you don't know what you want. You didn't want to be a husband or a father, that's for sure. Big playwright, big novelist, big delusional dreamer.

PAUL: You knew what I did when you met me. Remember, when you thought I was charming and creative.

KAREN: I thought you'd outgrow it. I thought when you started to have a family you'd prioritize. But not you.

PAUL: A hit novel makes a lot of money.

KAREN: You had a good steady day job at the bank, a Vice President.

PAUL: All title and no money. We've been through this a thousand times.

KAREN: It's not just that. You had no interest in the kids. You'd lock yourself up in your office after work and write until bedtime. You ignored the kids.

PAUL: I played with the kids.

KAREN: You ignored them. You wouldn't even play catch with your own son, why? Why, damn you?

PAUL (*rises from chair and paces*): How should I know? Because my father never played catch with me. Because I knew you wanted me to and I resented your controlling nature. Oh, you learn a lot when you've been in therapy twice a week for three years.

KAREN: Why the hell did you get married anyway?

PAUL: Why the hell does anyone get married? They're conditioned by society. They're co-dependent. Someone tells them how great they are and they buy into it.

KAREN: You threw away a promising career and a family for what? All I wanted was a husband. Why do you have to be the guy who writes plays and books?

PAUL: Because I can. Because somebody has to write them. If you hadn't noticed the plays are pretty good. People like them. Three of them are published.

KAREN: Great, the kids need the money for college.

PAUL: Well that about sums it up. It's all about the cash isn't it? Why didn't you marry Johnny the plumber if you wanted money? He's got piles of cash from that business and he chased you for years.

KAREN: Don't think that thought hasn't crossed my mind.

PAUL: Oh I'll tell you why. Because he couldn't make you laugh the way I could. He wouldn't take you out dancing or to the theatre. He didn't know Shakespeare from the three stooges. Well now I make plenty of people laugh when they see my plays. Sometimes I make them cry.

KAREN (*she mockingly claps her hands*): Bravo... Get over yourself. It's all about you, Paul, isn't it? It always was. You wanted to be the center of the universe.